

# Garage sale items could be hazardous

With the new garage sale season upon us, Health Canada reminds Canadians that with the bargains, comes the chance that some items might present safety hazards. Buyers should also be aware that the safety laws that apply to the sale of new products also apply to the sale of second-hand items.

Vendors are responsible for ensuring that all items sold or distributed at garage sales, flea markets, and second-hand stores fulfill the requirements of the Hazardous Products Act and the Radiation Emitting Devices Act, (REDA). The REDA Act covers such items as microwave ovens, UV facial lamps and personal tanning equipment. Resold items must also meet current standards.

To assist vendors and buyers, Health Canada continues to make its bulletin entitled Facts for Garage Sale Vendors available. This bulletin provides safety information about common garage sale products, such as children's sleepwear, car seats, baby gates, playpens, strollers, and sports equipment.

On a special note, garage sales may provide a source of good, gently-used blinds or window coverings. Extreme care should be taken when installing these items in their new surroundings to ensure that the cords associated with them do not endanger children. The tragic circumstances surrounding fatal and near-fatal accidents from window covering cords are often associated with older prod-

ucts. These products can be adapted to be much safer. More information on safety surrounding these items is available on Health Canada's Blinds and Curtain Cords website (<http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/blinds-cords>).

It should also be highlighted that in Canada it is illegal to sell baby walkers - either new or used. Additionally, anyone with a baby walker is advised to destroy the product prior to disposal to ensure that it cannot be reused.

For more information on the safety of second-hand consumer products, visit the Health Canada's website at <http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/garagesales> or call 1-866-662-0666. E-mail inquiries may be sent to: [cps-spc@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:cps-spc@hc-sc.gc.ca) (Please indicate the province or territory from which you are corresponding).



## Mulch – not just for looks

Many homeowners choose to mulch because they enjoy the well-cared-for look it gives their landscape. But, they may not realize they are also providing many benefits for their trees. With mulch the result can be a better growing environment for trees and their roots.

Homeowners should be aware that, generally, the root system of a tree spreads out, not down. "The roots of most trees extend out a significant distance from the trunk. Most of the fine absorbing roots of trees are located within inches of the soil surface," says Jim Skiera, Executive Director of the International Society of Arboriculture. These shallow roots are essential for taking up water and minerals for trees, and they require oxygen to survive. A thin layer of mulch, spread widely, can provide a healthier environment where these roots grow.

Properly applied mulch provides many benefits to the health of a tree. Unlike trees growing in a

forested environment, urban trees are not typically planted in an optimal environment for root growth and mineral uptake. Typically, urban environments are harsher with poor soil conditions and large fluctuations in moisture and temperature. Applying mulch can help reduce the stress of such conditions through these benefits:

- Helping to maintain soil moisture with less evaporation
- Reducing the number of weeds
- Providing insulation by keeping soil cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter
- Protecting from damage caused by lawn equipment such as weed-eaters and lawn mowers
- Improving soil fertility, aeration, and drainage

Mulches are either organic or inorganic material mixtures that are placed over the soil surface around the base of a tree. Mixtures consisting of various types of stone, rock, pulverized rubber, and other materials are labeled as inorganic. Because these types of mixtures do not decompose, they need replenishing less often. However, this also means they do not improve soil structure, provide nutrients, or add organic materials to the soil. Inorganic mulches do still provide other benefits such as insulation, and protection.

Organic mulches consist of wood chips, pine needles, bark, leaves, and other products derived from plants. These mulches decompose, thus are very beneficial in improving soil quality by replenishing

nutrients. They do however require more maintenance because decomposition creates the need to replenish more often.

### Do's and Don'ts

In order for mulch to be beneficial, it must be applied correctly. "All things in moderation should be a homeowner's mulching motto," says Skiera. "As beneficial as mulch is, too much can be harmful in more ways than one." Too much mulch can create excess moisture that may lead to root rot. Other problems created by over mulching include insect and disease problems, weed growth, sour smelling planting beds, and chewing rodents.

To ensure the health of your trees and plants, follow these practical mulching tips to landscape like the pros:

- Thin is better. Apply a 2 to 4-inch layer of mulch unless a drainage problems exist then a thinner layer is recommended. Do not add mulch if there is already a sufficient layer. Instead, rake the old mulch to break up any matted layers and refresh the appearance.
- No volcano mulching. Avoid placing mulch against the tree trunks. If mulch is already piled against the stems or tree trunks, pull it back several inches so that the base of the trunk and the root crown are exposed.
- Mulch Wide. Mulch out to the tree's drip line or beyond if possible.

*The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), headquartered in Champaign, Ill., is a nonprofit organization supporting tree care research and education around the world.*

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*Continued from page 23*  
carbon. Both nitrogen and carbon are required for successful composting. Grass clippings are also useful around trees, shrubs and vegetables as garden mulch, helping to enrich and moisten the soil.

•In the Fall, mulch leaves into the lawn. They are also an excellent source of nutrients for the lawn.

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